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Stupidity in tourism

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ABSTRACT

Various disciplines have called upon further exploration of stupidity. The issue is pertinent to tourism as well. Stupidity in tourism may occur due to the lack of sound judgment by those involved in tourism, and it can negatively impact tourists themselves, other people, animals, organisations, or destinations. We conceptualise various manifestations of stupidity in tourism by adapting Sternberg's Balanced Theory of Wisdom (2003) and Greenspan's Explanatory Model of Human Foolishness to an Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity (2019). We then view stupid behaviour through a framework developed by Cipolla in the book *The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity*. The framework places all people on two axes: losses/benefits to themselves and losses/benefits to others, thus resulting in four quadrants. This paper provides a basis for further investigation of the irrational behaviour of tourists and the impacts of circumstances on stupid behaviour.

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Introduction

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe. Attributed to Albert Einstein

Throughout the history of modern tourism, stupidity in tourism, evident in actions of destination marketing organisations, tourism businesses, and especially tourists, is unfortunately too common. Stupidity is something that has been largely overlooked in academia, yet is arguably part of human nature (Ronell, 2002; Van Boxsel, 2003). Stupidity continues to plague humanity despite the biological evolution of intelligence (Adee, 2013). *Nautilus*, the science magazine, recently called for more academic studies into the issue of stupidity (Gallagher, 2019). Academics interested in this area are called to investigate not only intelligence but also stupidity and cognitive biases.

By stupidity we do not mean individuals who lack cognitive ability, that is, intelligence, those with learning disabilities, mental retardation, or individuals who perform poorly in conventional tests (Sternberg, 2002b, p. viii). Neither is the term used in a derogatory manner. Our approach also differs from Weaver and Moyle (2019), where stupidity in tourism symbolises non-participation in smart tourism. Stupidity is the absence or lack of wisdom. Put differently, stupidity is people's inability to weigh options carefully and to act prudently. Greenspan (2019) refers to this as risk

unawareness. In other words, stupidity is the 'power of judging incorrectly and not following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, understanding, etc.' (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1997, p. 1533). Stupidity can be domain-dependent (Hyman, 2002): the same person could be smart in his or her home country and stupid when travelling, hence introducing stupidity in the tourism context. While there has been some work in trying to understand wisdom, as opposed to intelligence, we take this work as a basis for attempting to understand stupidity.

There are numerous reasons why someone might fail in one context and succeed in other contexts (Sternberg et al., 1995). In part, this has to do with different competencies or intelligences needed to succeed in a range of life domains. Numerous studies have demonstrated that formal intelligence tests show a weak correlation with wisdom, creativity, and practical intelligence (Mackintosh, 2011; Wagner, 1987, 2000).

The media regularly reports stupid things that tourists do (Bartlett, 2014) and say (Fraser, 2014). Increasingly, academic literature has explored tourists doing the right thing, that is, the ethics of tourism (Loi & Pearce, 2015; Tolkach et al., 2017), and tourists doing things right, that is, responsible tourist behaviour (Kang & Moscardo, 2006; Weeden, 2013). However, studies of tourists behaving in a way that does not reflect sound judgment and is irrational or irresponsible are lacking. Generally,

existing literature attributes stupid tourist behaviour to lack of awareness of local customs, to egoism, to hedonism and to lack of social pressures on tourists (McKercher, 2015; Pearce, 2019). Thus, it is appropriate that stupidity in tourism is recognised, conceptualised and elaborated on in an academic context.

Methods

This conceptual paper is constructivist in its epistemology aiming to interpret a phenomenon of stupidity in tourism. It has a critical element in that the paper posits questions regarding irrational and harmful behaviours undertaken by those actors involved in tourism. Recognising, defining, and analysing occurrences of stupidity in tourism contributes to understanding and managing tourism. Considering the dearth of research into stupidity in tourism, this paper aims to define and map the scope of the concept (Tribe & Liburd, 2016; Xin et al., 2013).

The term 'stupidity' is both encompassing and relatively specific, thus useful for a conceptualisation of behaviour that commonly occurs in tourism, but is yet to be theorised. We focus on stupid behaviour as opposed to stupid people (Greenspan, 2019; Sternberg, 2002a). Intelligent people can do stupid things. A person might be stupid in one context and not stupid in another. It may be tempting to label people who frequently do stupid things as 'stupid' or a 'fool', as mentioned by Cipolla (1987), but we focus on the nature and causes of stupid behaviour that occurs in the world.

Upon reviewing various streams of literature related to the topic, it became apparent that achieving a conceptualisation that is applicable and useful for tourism studies requires drawing on developmental and cognitive psychology as well as behavioural economics. A utilitarian consequence-based approach is taken in identifying stupidity in tourism employing Cipolla's (1987) framework. Without apparent negative consequences, it is extremely challenging to identify stupid behaviour and separate it from mere fun. However, only focusing on consequences is insufficient to understand stupidity, thus we adapt and apply work by Greenspan (2019) and Sternberg (2003) to delve into antecedents of stupidity in tourism.

The paper is structured as follows. It first briefly sketches Sternberg's (2003) Balanced Theory of Wisdom before proposing an Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity. The Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity outlines the antecedents for stupidity leading to an imbalance of interests and responses which results in negative outcomes for the individual and society more generally. We then apply the framework developed by Cipolla

(1987) in *The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity* to the tourism context. The original framework places all people on two dimensions: losses/benefits to themselves on one axis and losses/benefits to others on another axis, thus resulting in four quadrants. Stupid behaviour may occur during activities undertaken by tourists but is not limited to tourists. We demonstrate that stupid actions are present in the decision-making undertaken in the planning, development, and marketing activities of businesses and destinations. While other stakeholders are also involved in tourism (e.g. various government departments, residents, non-governmental organisations) and may exhibit stupid behaviour, we focus on the most immediate actors involved in creating and consuming tourism, namely tourists, tourism businesses, and destination marketing organisations. Moreover, we propose several avenues for further research.

Stupidity

Admittedly, stupidity is hard to define. Partly this is because the term is used colloquially. The term is often used as the opposite of intelligence, however, stupidity is typically a judgmental term applied to an action done with intent, but also actions undertaken with a lack of insight, or without sound judgment (Ronell, 2002).

Psychologists attempt to comprehend processes that lead to people taking stupid actions. Especially interesting are the cases that do not appear to be related to intelligence (Hyman, 2002). Lack of knowledge (including tacit knowledge), lack of analytical capabilities (for example, assessing risks), lack of social-emotional intelligence, mindlessness, prior learning (that is, previous experience of undertaking similar stupid actions without negative consequences), irrationality, and personality disposition have all been discussed in the psychology literature (Sternberg, 2002b) as possible reasons for stupid behaviour.

The above discussions of stupidity are useful for understanding the phenomenon as part of human nature and human behaviour. These disciplines focus on the subject: the stupid person. On the contrary, Cipolla's (1987) approach is teleological, the focus is on the consequences of stupid actions. Such an approach is more relevant when applied to the tourism context, since it is the consequences of actions, that is, the impacts of tourism, that are the overarching problems that need to be addressed. The criticism of utilitarianism, in which the action resulting in the maximum goodness is the right one, has been long established within ethics. One of them is the potential lack of information, which

leads to an inability of determining the outcome of an action. Moreover, time is of concern. This is especially relevant to have discussions on sustainability: the greatest good in the short-term may be negative in the longer-term, e.g. the short-term economic growth may be seen as beneficial, however, depletion of resources and degradation of the environment may have more severe long-term impacts. The third common critique is that utilitarianism may be viewed as the majority rule: whatever benefits most people are the right action, however, the benefits to the majority may come at the expense of the minority. Thus, utilitarian actions may not be fair or just (Fennell, 2006). These limitations of an outcome-based approach to identifying stupid actions need to be taken into account, as the judgement of an action's outcome is somewhat subjective to the timing of the judgement, the information known to, and the personal values of the person passing the judgement.

Cipolla's (1987) framework is highly applied and is efficient in identifying potential stupidity in human behaviour. To understand stupidity holistically, however, complementary theories are required that investigate the process of stupid decision-making. Understanding how and why stupid decisions are made then can facilitate the development of a means to reduce their occurrence. The next section will address cognitive processes that lead to a stupid action, followed by the discussion on the outcomes of stupid actions. We advocate for both approaches to be used jointly to understand stupidity.

The balanced theory of wisdom

Sternberg (2003, p. 157) defines wisdom as

the application of successful intelligence and creativity as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests, over (a) short and (b) long terms, to achieve a balance among ... existing environments.

As explained by Sternberg (2003), achieving the common good, that is positive outcomes not only for the individual but also for society in general, requires a balance between the interests of the individual (intrapersonal), interests of others (interpersonal) and interests of the wider society (extrapersonal). An individual who is selfish and ignores the interests of others and the wider society does not demonstrate wisdom. This would be an imbalance of interests. Problem-solving that involves wisdom requires some elements of each of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal

interests. Different individuals balance these three interests through various means (Sternberg, 1998).

The next stage in the model shows responses to the environment, i.e. individuals need wisdom to balance various courses of action to succeed in a situation they found themselves in. Greenspan (2019) refers to environment as context or situation. Situations or context can increase or decrease the likelihood of stupid behaviour. The tourism context may mean individuals are unaware of obvious risks leading them to do something stupid. The context then interacts with the internal factors; cognitive, personality, and affective; described below to influence the individual towards doing something stupid. This is why, in some contexts, tourists will do something stupid and in other contexts, they will not. Alternatively, in the same context, some tourists will do something stupid and other tourists will not, depending on these cognitive, personality-based, and affective factors.

Successful intelligence

The key driver for wisdom in Sternberg's Balanced Theory of Wisdom is what he terms 'Successful Intelligence' (Sternberg, 1997). Successful intelligence has elements of conventional intelligence and creativity but is mostly determined by tacit knowledge underlying practical intelligence (Sternberg, 1998). Tacit knowledge is 'action-oriented, typically acquired without direct help from others, and allows individuals to achieve goals they personally value' (Sternberg et al., 1995). Tacit knowledge can be thought of as knowledge in practice. Part of practical intelligence, tacit knowledge is rarely acquired from others because it relates to 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing what'. It is often acquired indirectly. Tacit knowledge is procedural so that it is related to 'doing' rather than 'knowing'. Tacit knowledge is also context-dependent. What applies in one context doesn't necessarily apply in other contexts (Sternberg, 1998). The fact that tacit knowledge concerns understanding patterns of behaviour means that it is about knowing what to do rather than knowing facts or objective information. Tacit knowledge helps individuals negotiate life and achieve goals. It is useful for problem-solving.

The imbalanced theory of stupidity

The focus of this study is to describe the nexus between stupidity and tourism. Therefore, we modify and adapt Sternberg's Balanced Theory of Wisdom and adapt Sternberg's (2003, p. 160) conceptualisation of foolishness to outline an Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity

(Figure 1). The underlying reasons for stupidity are attributed to four factors. Sternberg (2003) refers to these as fallacies. They are omniscience, omnipotence, egocentrism, and invulnerability. The first two of these factors are what Greenspan (2019) would categorise as cognitive factors. The second two are personality factors (Greenspan, 2019). Greenspan (2019) adds a fifth factor: Affect / State.

Omniscience and omnipotence are two cognitive factors that contribute to stupid behaviour. The fallacy of omniscience occurs when individuals think they know more than they actually do, colloquially they may be referred to as 'know-it-alls'. This can result in situations where individuals act, using the information they have, as they would in a context they are familiar with and have mastery over. They believe they are in a similar situation or life domain and possess the required tacit knowledge when in reality they do not. As a result, what works for them and what they know in the domains of their expertise, fails them in this new context. Much stupidity occurs when individuals and groups think they know more than they actually know. Meacham (1983) notes that a key aspect of being wise is for individuals to recognise what they know and what they do not know.

Omnipotence – a belief you are all-powerful – is also a source of stupidity. When individuals are extremely powerful in certain domains, having power over different resources, essentially doing whatever they want, the risk is that these individuals believe they are omnipotent across other domains; domains where they do not have expertise. This can lead to stupidity. Recognising one's faults and limitations is also a precursor to being wise (Kitchener & Brenner, 1990).

People sometimes act stupidly because of their egocentrism. In such scenarios individuals are selfish, they prioritise intrapersonal interests while ignoring interpersonal interests and extrapersonal interests, thus creating an imbalance (Figure 1). Egocentrism is related to personality traits (Greenspan, 2019). Traits such as an overly unreasonable and exaggerated self-esteem feed egocentrism and blind people to do something stupid.

Sternberg's (2003) last folly is the fallacy of invulnerability. Individuals may believe they are impervious from harm when they are overconfident in their abilities, whether from over planning or an abundance of resources. This perceived invulnerability leads to an inability to recognise risks and may result in stupid actions. This invulnerability may derive from a narcissistic personality trait (Greenspan, 2019).

Greenspan (2019, p. 35) proposes that Affect / State is another factor contributing to stupidity. Affect relates to feelings and emotions (fear or anger, for example) while

State refers to (dis)equilibrium (exhaustion, sexual arousal, drunkenness, for example). If an individual has affect/state in excessive quantities then they are more likely to do foolish things. Their self-regulating processes are out of equilibrium.

The presence of any one or a combination of these factors can result in stupid behaviour. All the factors do not need to be present for stupid behaviour to occur. Some factors may be stronger than others or even work in opposite directions, making the predictability of stupid acts difficult. As such, as noted by Greenspan (2019, p. 35), given the interplay between these variable factors, the examples of stupidity in tourist behaviour, and stupid decisions by tourism businesses and destinations are analysed post-hoc.

Figure 1 provides an explanation for stupid behaviour. Five internal factors in conjunction with the external factor of context lead to an imbalance of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and extrapersonal interests resulting in stupidity. Rather than successful intelligence being the source of wisdom, fallacies are the source of stupidity.

The basic laws of human stupidity

Cipolla (1987) posits five fundamental laws of stupidity based on the consequences of actions. Focus on the utility of actions is useful in identifying stupid acts, otherwise they may go unnoticed as innocent fun, which is fine since there is no cost to society. The downside to using such a framework is that analysis of an action takes place based on the best available information, i.e. an action deemed stupid may prove not to be such if the information available changes. As with many utilitarian frameworks, including utilitarian ethics (Tolkach et al., 2017), there is an element of subjectivity as well: who decides the utility of an action? For example, one may consider doing tricks on a skateboard and breaking a leg in the process as stupid. However, if a famous skateboarder tries to perform a trick no one has ever done before and gains sponsorship money while inspiring youth, the action ceases to be stupid. Nevertheless, consequences provide the best opportunity to identify stupid acts. We outline these laws and note their applicability to tourism in the following sections. The five fundamental laws of stupidity are as follows:

- (1) Always and inevitably, the number of stupid individuals in circulation is underestimated.

The first law relates to the fact that whatever technological advancements and ingenuity humans create,

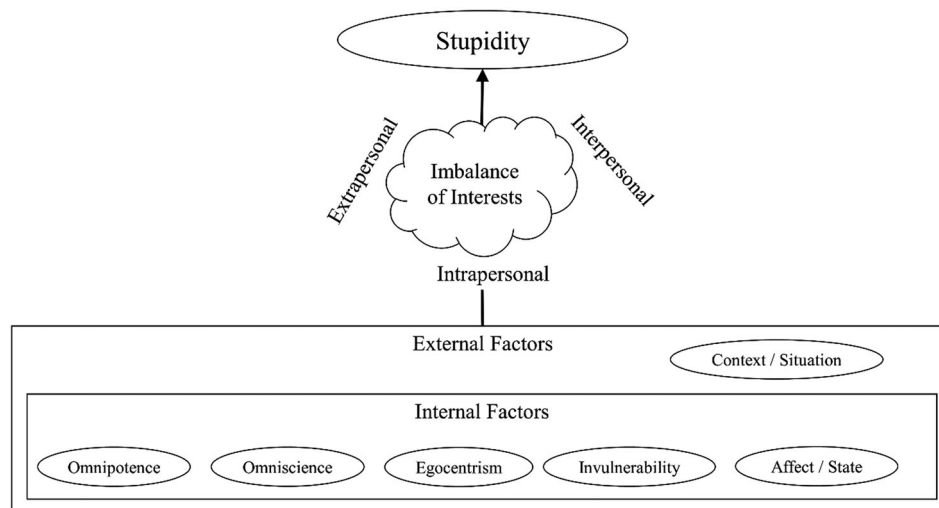


Figure 1. Imbalanced theory of stupidity.

society is still affected by the activities of stupid individuals. These stupid acts can come from individuals who are deemed 'rational' and 'intelligent' but act stupidly without warning in inopportune times and places. Cipolla (1987, p. 2) is reluctant to put an exact percentage on the proportion of stupid people within the total population, warning that 'any numerical estimate would turn out to be an underestimate'.

- (2) The probability that a certain person (will) be stupid is independent of any other characteristic of that person.

Cipolla (1987) claims that while it is trendy to think that all humans are created equal, he argues that stupidity is inherent to an individual. Stupidity is not dependent on gender, ethnicity, or race. Rather than arguing for a super race of non-stupid people or systemic discrimination of stupid people having a certain characteristic, stupidity is an indiscriminate characteristic of all human groups. Further, stupidity can be found in populations regardless of the standard of education and regardless of how large the population group being observed.

- (3) A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or a group of persons while himself derives no gain and possibly incurs losses.

Cipolla (1987) divides individuals by whether their acts result in gains or losses for either themselves, others, or both. Individuals can be segmented on two axes of losses/benefits to themselves and losses/benefits to others, thus resulting in four quadrants. The quadrants can then be described as intelligent (gains to themselves; gains to others), the helpless (losses to

themselves; gains to others), the bandit (gains to themselves; losses to others), and the stupid (losses to themselves; losses to others). The scholarly interest in behavioural economics has arisen because economists, social psychologists, and others have recognised that individuals do not act consistently (Kahneman, 2003). In some situations, an individual might act intelligently and in other situations, the same person will act helplessly (Kahneman et al., 1991). Therefore, individuals can be plotted on the map in Figure 2 based on a weighted average of their actions.

Cipolla (1987) argues that only stupid people, as labelled in the stupid quadrant, are consistent in all areas of life. Stupid people are consistent because they are fundamentally and unceasingly stupid – they persist in causing harm to other people and themselves. For this reason, stupid people will always be and remain in the bottom left stupid quadrant. This generally contrasts with the view that stupidity is context (Greenspan, 2019) or domain-dependent (Sternberg, 2002b).

While no group of people can be defined as stupid based on their background, external environmental factors, such as social, cultural, economic, and political circumstances can contribute to the stupidity of an individual (Simon, 1990). The power of a stupid person manifests from being unpredictable. Intelligent people cannot fathom or understand their unreasonable behaviour. Bandits (gains to themselves; losses to others) are easier to understand as they are seeking to gain at the expense of others. They are acting in their self-interest. For this reason, people cannot predict the behaviour of those in the 'stupid' quadrant nor can others prepare to defend themselves or guard against losses because of stupid people.

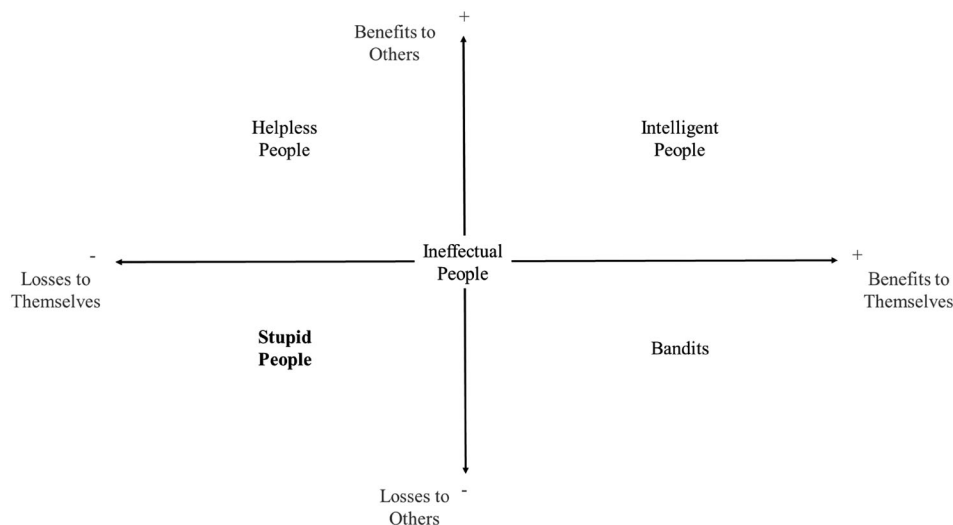


Figure 2. Cipolla's theory of stupidity.

- (4) Non-stupid people always underestimate the damaging power of stupid individuals. In particular, non-stupid people constantly forget that at all times, places, and under any circumstances to deal and/or associate with stupid people always turns out to be a costly mistake.

While it follows that people from the 'helpless' quadrant do not recognise how dangerous stupid people are to them and their surroundings, intelligent people and bandits also do not recognise the power of stupidity. This may be due to self-complacency on their behalf or contempt for the stupid person.

- (5) A stupid person is the most dangerous type of person.

From a societal welfare point of view, the stupid person is worse than the bandit in that the bandit at least gains some benefit at the expense of others. Society as a whole is neither better nor worse off. This can be thought of as a zero-sum game. Moreover, a bandit acts in self-interest and is thus more predictable than a stupid person. However, in the case of the actions of the stupid person, no one is better off and the whole society is worse off: a lose-lose situation.

Is stupidity in tourism special?

People can be stupid in any context, but there are characteristics of travel experience that can trigger or heighten stupidity. Tourism has been described as a predominantly hedonistic and liminal experience (McKercher, 2015), thus a tourist's pursuit of an instant sense of happiness

may be at the expense of others and, in the longer-term, be detrimental to the tourist her/himself. Tourism and the practice of travelling require practical intelligence and life skills more than academic knowledge (Pearce & Foster, 2007). Sternberg et al. (1995) outline the situations where practical intelligence is needed. These include situations where the problems are: (1) not articulated or at least in need of reformulation; (2) personally relevant; (3) the solutions are not obvious; (4) relate to the lived experience; (5) not well-defined; (6) no single 'correct' solution is obvious, each with costs and benefits; and (7) there may be numerous ways to arrive at a correct solution. Individuals can act differently while on vacation than at home, often with a higher likelihood of unethical actions (Selanniemi, 2003; Tolkach et al., 2017). Tourists are less sure, and thus less likely to adhere to, the rules and social norms of the place they are travelling to. Gnoth (1997) warns that hedonic or emotionally-driven tourist behaviour can be irrational. An individual will rely on sure cues and choose certain options rather than uncertain ones (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). This can lead to stupid behaviour. Neisser (1976) viewed this as the difference between 'book smarts' versus 'street smarts' behaviour.

Importantly, tacit knowledge, which is a part of Sternberg's (2003) successful intelligence, is very much context-dependent. Tacit knowledge in one context does not necessarily apply in other contexts. Individuals, who may be an expert in one domain, may assume they are experts in other domains, too (omniscience). Their confidence in their wisdom may lead to stupidity (invulnerability). This is where the tourism context can play a contributing factor to stupidity. Everyday life is conditioned by a collection of behaviours and norms of

what is acceptable and what is not acceptable (Rafalovich, 2006). Members of society 'know' what the acceptable rules of daily life are. Often, the 'rules' of social interaction are unstated. The host community may not be consciously aware of these 'rules' but residents of the community follow these commonly accepted social rules (Ritzer, 1996). Tourists, on the other hand, may not be aware of the commonly accepted rules of the host country. Alternatively, tourists might not want to follow these rules while on vacation. While travelling, tourists do not need to consider as many social, cultural, or organisational factors to make reasonable decisions (McKercher, 2015). Some tourists are more likely to exhibit unethical and deviant behaviour during travel than at home (McKercher et al., 2008), as they indulge in a hedonic activity with fewer social constraints that are present in a place of usual residence.

The advent of smart tourism has also contributed to a conceptualisation of stupidity in tourism as a wilful and inadvertent lack of participation in the smart tourism environment (Weaver & Moyle, 2019). Smart tourism is defined as

tourism supported by integrated efforts at a destination to collect and aggregate/harness data derived from physical infrastructure, social connections, government/organizational sources and human bodies/minds in combination with the use of advanced technologies to transform that data into on-site experiences and business value-propositions with a clear focus on efficiency, sustainability, and experience enrichment. (Gretzel et al., 2015)

Thus, Weaver and Moyle (2019) propose stupid tourism to mean non-conformance to the expected use of technologies by tourists for example by not using a smartphone when expected, or writing fake online reviews. Interestingly, privileging technophilia might be considered a sign of destination stupidity. This perspective of stupidity in tourism as an acknowledgement that not all tourists may be able or willing to participate in smart technologies and may even sabotage them is auxiliary to the present paper, however, we would like to expand stupidity in our conceptualisation beyond technology.

Modifying Cipolla's (1987) basic laws of stupidity, we note, with Sternberg (2002a) and Greenspan (2019), that stupidity contains some degree of domain specificity. Individuals who are stupid in one domain can be smart in other domains. However, unlike Cipolla (1987), we argue that stupidity is not inherent. In the next section, we investigate how the Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity and Cipolla's framework can be applied to the context of tourism across three units of analysis: tourists, tourism businesses, and tourism policymakers.

We use examples from both academic literature and mainstream media to illustrate our application.

Stupid tourist behavior

Stupid acts result in losses to those perpetrating the act and to others. This can be exacerbated when these acts are done by tourists. Hedonic or emotionally-driven tourists can act irrationally, making unplanned and impulsive decisions (Gnoth, 1997; Hyde & Lawson, 2003) or behave unethically (Tolkach et al., 2017). Stupid actions may occur out of displaying omnipotence, omniscience, egocentrism, or invulnerability. Their emotions/state may be a contributor, not comprehending the context or lack of reflection (Ronell, 2002; Sternberg, 2002b), thus stupidity is worth exploring in the tourism context as, by definition, a tourist is placed in a less familiar environment that might be challenging to navigate.

The popular website, The Darwin Awards (<https://darwinawards.com/>), started in 1985, chronicles people who, either by death or sterilisation have removed themselves from the gene pool by their stupid actions, therefore, helping humans' chances of long-term survival. Unfortunately, as noted in the First Law of Stupidity: everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals. The following examples identify stupid tourist behaviour that causes losses to tourists themselves and others. While the authors made every attempt to be objective in the selection and representation of these examples, there is an element of subjectivity when considering outcomes of an action and what behaviour can be defined as stupid. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that stupid actions may be undertaken due to various external factors that lead to an impulsive decision without an opportunity for a careful decision-making process to take place. Thus, the below examples reflect on the actions and do not intend to judge the individuals involved.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the stupidity of some people including tourists, who behaved irrationally and irresponsibly in the face of this health crisis. In March 2020 despite the imminent threat of the coronavirus outbreak and despite warnings from public health experts of the need to physically distance, spring breakers flocked to Florida to continue partying (CBS News, 2020). These tourists ignored warning of staying at least two meters away from other people and congregating in groups of less than ten people. This stupidity threatened, not only the lives of themselves but the lives of others, if the virus was to spread. The stupidity stemming from the omnipotence, invulnerability, and possibly from the affect was

exemplified in the quote from one tourist on spring break from Ohio: 'If I get corona, I get corona. At the end of the day, I'm not gonna let it stop me from partying, We're just out here having a good time. Whatever happens, happens' (CBS News, 2020). This example includes all five of Cipolla's laws. As reported by CBS News (2020), there were a large number of people with such attitudes and while young people were highlighted in the case of spring breaks, there are no specific characteristics that can help identify people that do not follow COVID-19 prevention guidelines. There is no benefit incurred from not taking these precautions besides slightly more convenience of not having a face mask and having potential hedonic pleasures of socialising. Associating with people that behave stupidly, in this case, is literally life-threatening, and these people are endangering the lives of thousands of people and the global economy by spreading the virus during their travels.

A recent spate of deaths of people taking 'selfies' demonstrates Cipolla's 1st Law that the number of stupid people is generally underestimated (Lovitt, 2016). The plethora of tourists that vary by age, gender, and nationality (CTV News, 2016; Daily News, 2014; Durando, 2015; Pennock, 2017; The Local, 2015; The Times of Israel, 2015) who have died in the process of taking a photograph of themselves reinforces Cipolla's 2nd Law that the probability that a certain person is stupid is independent of their characteristics. A typical example is a Polish couple who plunged to their deaths down a cliff in Portugal after they climbed over a safety barrier to take a photograph of themselves (Gillman, 2014). The couple's five and six-year-old children witnessed the accident and underwent psychiatric treatment. These selfie deaths are a combination of the follies of omnipotence and egocentrism. These tourists believe they know more than others in terms of their limitations about what is safe and what is dangerous. The couple who ignored the safety barrier felt they know more than the officials who erected the barrier as to the limits of safety. Similarly, those who had climbing or riding accidents while taking their photographs overestimated their ability to do these two things simultaneously, leading to stupidity. The quest for the best selfie also contributed to stupidity. This egocentric behaviour is driven by the tourists' desire to have bragging rights on social media about their travel experience (Kerr et al., 2012). In Greenberg's terminology, they are unaware of the risks to their health and well-being.

Not all stupid tourists lose their lives in stupid acts. Their stupid actions result in other types of losses to the destination, other tourists, or the local community. Some of these acts are specific to tourists' ignorance

or lack of respect towards the local culture and social norms. For example, two American sisters aged 20 and 22, were charged with indecent trafficking pornography and exposing genitalia after being caught taking naked photos of each other inside the UNESCO site at Preah Khan temple. This holy site at Angkor Wat is sacred to Cambodians and their actions were deeply offensive to the local culture. As a consequence, they have been banned from returning to Cambodia for four years as well as being fined 1 million riels (\$US250) each, given six-month suspended jail sentences and were deported by bus to Thailand (De Graaf, 2015). The fallacy in these cases is predominantly egocentrism. The tourists are putting their own needs and desires above those in the local community. They did not exhibit self-reflection or consider others in their decisions. In many cases of stupidity, alcohol, and/or drugs influences the tourists' behaviour. Cipolla's 2nd and 3rd laws are again on display here as these tourists cannot be described as Cipolla's bandits, but only as stupid, as there was no benefit incurred to them, and there is no specific characteristic of these people that could help predict the stupid act. These examples highlight the characteristics of stupid tourists and demonstrate their ubiquity.

Stupidity in tourism businesses

It would have been limited in scope to suggest that stupidity in tourism arises only from tourist behaviour. Tourism businesses have the opportunity to provide employment and income to employees and return a profit for tourism entrepreneurs. Tourism businesses can provide goods and services to tourists that showcase a destination. However, there are documented cases of stupidity in tourism businesses, which due to lack of planning, lack of business acumen, lack of risk assessment, or lack of market awareness have gone out of operation while incurring costs to both public and private investors. Examples presented here generally result from lack of judgment of individual(s), thus arguably the same psychological principles may be applied to decision-making in organisations (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008).

Alvesson and Spicer (2012), in their theory of organisations, claim that some organisations exhibit *functional stupidity*. Functional stupidity occurs when an organisation fails to be reflexive, uses substantive reasoning, or justify their actions. Lack of reflexivity is the inability or unwillingness to challenge existing norms or think critically about dominant beliefs and expectations (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Lack of justification involves people not having to provide a rationale or explanation for decisions while a lack of substantive reasoning

relates to organisations being myopic. By failing to seek outside counsel and only using the resources available to them inside the organisation, their insularity can have negative consequences. This form of stupidity is not necessarily related to cognitive intelligence (Sternberg, 2002b).

Much of this sort of stupidity is a result of the omniscience fallacy. Tourism businesses are not reflective enough. In essence, these businesses believe they know more than they do and are not humble enough to admit that they might not know certain things in certain situations, leading to an imbalance of interests and stupidity. Berlin Brandenburg airport is an example of stupidity in tourism planning and development. It was supposed to open in 2010 and is now scheduled to open in October 2020 (CNN, 2017; The Berlin Spectator, 2020). With costs estimated at £2.8 billion, well above the initial projected cost of £900 million (Hutchinson, 2014), the Berlin Brandenburg airport typifies stupid decisions in tourism businesses. Berlin Brandenburg airport has been a victim of multiple scandals and accusations of corruption. However, what makes this example one of stupidity is that the delays in opening and increasing costs are largely due to issues with construction design, which means the airport is not safe to operate. Carelessness in the original designing of the airport and appointment of inappropriate staff to manage the development as well as lack of accountability led to these issues. Rectifying the building so that it is safe to operate required multiple expensive alterations that were avoidable if the original designs were appropriate. The example also highlights the high extent of damage stupid actions may bring (5th law) and that associating with stupid people is damaging (4th law).

The introduction of technology does not necessarily mean a reduction in stupidity. The use of technology requires training and sound judgment, whilst lack thereof may lead to stupid actions (Weaver & Moyle, 2019). The increasing importance of user-generated content on travel review websites has increased the temptation and proclivity to do stupid things (Schuckert et al., 2016). One of Australia's largest hotel chains was found guilty of violating consumer law by preventing disgruntled guests from posting negative comments on the popular TripAdvisor website (CNN, 2018). A federal court fined the hotel chain \$US2.2 million for the offense. Employees were also ordered to take part in a three-year Competition and Consumer Law Compliance Program, including developing policies on consumer law compliance, complaint handling, whistleblower protection, and compliance reporting. Potentially bad reviews could not be lodged on

TripAdvisor as hotel staff gave TripAdvisor invalid email addresses for complaining customers. The company in question survived the negative publicity and financial loss, however, the case demonstrates the great risks that a feeling of omnipotence may have for tourism businesses. Schuckert et al. (2016) suggest that from an analysis of 41,572 ratings on TripAdvisor, up to 20% of these are suspicious. While businesses feel omnipotent trying to outsmart online review systems, the outcome is rather damaging to themselves and others. This case highlights the first three of Cipolla's laws, as the damaging practice of faking ratings is widespread, appears in a variety of destinations and types of businesses, and is highly damaging.

Given the importance of online reputation (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2011), the ubiquitous practice of providing fake online reviews, not only damages the reputation of others but is self-harming to business also. In all these instances, the tourism businesses lose by going bankrupt, closing, or exceeding budgets. Relying on luck not to be caught may not be wise considering the damage. Business decisions affect not only owners and management but also employees and communities in which they operate. There are follow-on effects for potential tourists, other businesses, and the public sector. These businesses provide jobs and income for local residents and generate additional economic activity through their supply chain. With their closing and incurring debts, the oft-cited multiplier effect is working in reverse, creating losses for others as well as for themselves. Thus, it is important to recognise fallacies by businesses and discourage businesses from undertaking stupid actions, as they impact society.

Stupidity in destination marketing organizations

Destination Marketing Organization (DMOs) are tasked with promoting their destination to raise awareness and image to attract tourists to visit the destination (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). However, DMOs are not immune to acts of stupidity that are grounded in the same fallacies as individual tourist behaviour, and tourism business decisions. At times, DMOs create and implement stupid marketing strategies, which not only create losses to themselves in terms of a tarnished reputation and public scorn but also hurt others in the destination, as potential tourists are discouraged from visiting the destination so that the destination misses the benefits that tourism can bring.

From the Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity, the fallacies most attributable to stupidity by Destination Marketing Organizations are omnipotence and omniscience. In

the examples that follow, DMOs have acted as if they have the expertise to cover all situations and that, being successful on previous occasions and in other contexts, have made them immune to self-reflection, scepticism, and a reasonable level of self-examination before proceeding with their marketing campaigns. In terms of Cipolla's laws, these examples highlight the damage to self and others through association with people who act stupidly. One such campaign was Washington State's 'Say WA' (Marshall, 2006). The director of the State's tourism office claims the slogan was developed based on research, where the idea took a year and a half to develop from a 32-member brand development task force. Members of this task force included industry representatives and tourism officials. The advertising campaign had a budget of \$US 442,000. Other stakeholders, such as the local media, Seattle Hotel Association, Washington State Lodging Association, a Washington State ferry transportation company and Washington State University faculty felt the campaign was confusing and not representative of the brand values or image of the State, thus unable to encourage potential tourists. The campaign was ended prematurely as a result.

In 2018, a tourism marketing video produced by Fiji's DMO, Tourism Fiji, caused embarrassment and offense in the strongly Christian country. The promotion showed various Fijian words translated into English as a fun way for tourists to learn the indigenous language (McMah, 2018). However, 'toilet' (Fijian *vale lailai*) was translated as *vale ni lotu* meaning 'church' or 'house of worship'. Blaming the mistake on a 'graphic design error', Fiji's DMO quickly removed the offending video from its Facebook and Instagram accounts and issued an apology. However, the outrage is not based purely on the translation mistake, but also on the longstanding issue of non-Fijian staff with lack of local cultural understanding working for Tourism Fiji. The lack of care regarding local culture in tourism marketing is an ongoing issue in Fiji (Cheer et al., 2018; McMaha, 2018). While demonstrating the omniscience of those working at Tourism Fiji (the lack of scrutiny of their activities), this case also highlights that not only tourists may lack understanding of local culture and social norms, but also businesses and DMOs.

More broadly, an example of stupidity practiced by DMOs is the continued marketing and promotion of destinations where tourists already exceed the existing carrying capacity. Examples are appearing in both the academic literature (Seraphin et al., 2018) and mainstream media (Somers Cocks, 2017) where DMOs continue to rather mindlessly promote a destination facing overtourism, that is, a high volume of visitors that

leads to the detriment of the visitor experience and resident welfare. Overtourism has led to locals' loss of sense of belonging and sense of place, increased congestion, and the detrimental use of urban, rural, and coastal spaces. As a consequence, in destinations such as Venice (Seraphin et al., 2018) and Barcelona, anti-tourism protesters are active, damaging cities' reputation and its economy (Milano et al., 2019a). In other cases, uncontrolled growth of tourism leads to complete closure of destinations, such as Boracay (Canoy et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2018). Somers Cocks (2017) reports that despite UNESCO's threat to put Venice on its 'sites in danger' list, the Comune (town council) of Venice has been actively marketing to tourists from China, as with its presentation at Expo 2010 Shanghai and enticing Chinese investment in tourism and other sectors of the economy, through trade agreements with Chinese officials in 2016. Applying the utilitarian approach, unlimited tourism growth may appear as a successful strategy in the short-term, however, lack of assessment of impacts ultimately results in severe negative consequences for destinations in the long-term. Consequently, a short-term focus in tourism development has become increasingly criticised in tourism studies (Lew et al., 2020). Although, complete opposition to tourism or sabotaging tourism development, which has been termed 'tourismphobia' (Milano et al., 2019b) may also be stupid. Thus, in planning for sustainable tourism of the future it is important to consider the propensity of various stakeholders to behave stupidly and aim to minimize such risks.

These are examples of stupidity in tourism destinations where marketing campaigns have hurt, not only the DMOs itself but also related tourism businesses and the local community.

Discussion & conclusions

As tourism academia and industry aim to manage tourism sustainably via application of smart tourism methods or otherwise, often it is assumed that tourists will behave rationally to benefit themselves, and increasingly it is expected that they will benefit others. However, the decision-making of tourists and workers in tourism businesses and at DMOs may be irrational, lacking sound judgment, impulsive, emotional, and stupid (Hergesell et al., 2019; Weaver & Moyle, 2019). Stupid behaviour in tourism is especially important to study due to the hedonic and egoistic nature of tourism and the placement of tourists outside of their usual cultural environment, thus placing tourists in a context where they lack tacit knowledge. To further complicate matters, businesses and DMOs may make

stupid decisions out of false beliefs in their knowledge, power, or invulnerability.

Bringing tourists, tourism businesses, and tourist destinations together, we adapt Sternberg's (2003) Balanced Theory of Wisdom and Greenspan's (2019) Explanatory Model of Human Foolishness to an Imbalanced Theory of Stupidity and Cipolla's (1987) Laws of Human Stupidity to a Theory of Stupidity in Tourism (Figure 2). Being stupid results in losses to the individual and others. Various examples demonstrating the usefulness of such conceptualisation to comprehend stupid actions by tourists, businesses, and DMOs have been provided. Since other literature has explored other quadrants of Cipolla's framework, we focused on the 'stupid' quadrant.

Tourism that benefits all stakeholders (tourists, tourism businesses and the destination / local communities) has been highlighted in the discussion of responsible tourists (Ng et al., 2017; Weeden & Boluk, 2014), sustainable tourism businesses (Patterson, 2015) and destinations (Vanhove, 2017). There is also a growing body of knowledge in the tourism area covering behaviours and policies benefiting certain stakeholders to the detriment of others. These tourism typologies include irresponsible tourists, unethical businesses, and myopic tourism destinations (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Loi & Pearce, 2015). There is even emerging literature into tourism where others benefit to the detriment of tourists, tourism businesses, or destinations. Examples of these tourism types include last chance tourism (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017) where the tourists benefit from seeing and experiencing landscapes or seascapes that are disappearing. Their visits, by their very nature, may contribute to the destinations' degradation or eradication.

Several examples have been provided within this study to demonstrate that tourism is a rather unique setting where even highly intelligent people are likely to perform stupid acts due to lack of tacit knowledge combined with the liminal and hedonic nature of much of tourism. From the supply perspective, tourism businesses and DMOs also demonstrate abundant examples when a lack of successful intelligence leads to a lack of sound judgment. A limitation of the study is that the assessment of benefits and losses is somewhat subjective. For example, some may consider becoming posthumously famous as a result of death from a stupid act as a benefit.

One immediate question arises originating from this exploratory piece of work: how do you decide which tourists are stupid and which actions are stupid? A plethora of scholars has proposed sustainable tourism development indicators (for example Miller, 2001;

Roberts & Tribe, 2008; Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). Few scholars have attempted to develop indicators for 'bad' (or stupid) tourism (Loi & Pearce, 2015; Tsaour et al., 2018; Tsaour et al., 2019). While sustainable and responsible tourism is a positive aspiration to ensure the negative impacts of tourism are limited the irrationality of behaviour, the lack of tacit knowledge, and fallacies such as omniscience and omnipotence need to be considered. This study cautions against reliance on frameworks that assume tourism stakeholders always act in their self-interest or act rationally. Evidently, stupidity arises from the factors of egocentrism, omnipotence, omniscience, and invulnerability, influenced by affect/state and the context/situation (Ronell, 2002; Sternberg, 2002b). Similar to tackling unethical behaviours (Tolkach et al., 2017), the reduction of stupid behaviours can be considered through a combination of education and penalties. Tourists should be encouraged to learn about the places they visit, while penalties for negatively affecting destinations should be also severe. While stupid behaviours cannot be eradicated, eradicating underlying issues that may lead to fallacies described above will benefit tourists and residents. Stupid behaviour should be expected, and thus prevented with barriers making a risky act impossible, while severe penalties and potential consequences of stupid acts (e.g. death) must be communicated clearly to tourists.

Similarly, businesses and DMOs need to be conscious of risks their actions might have, as most of the provided examples suggest consulting more stakeholders or undertaking further analysis of projects' feasibility will preclude most stupid actions. Thus, this study fits in the discourse of sustainable, responsible, and smart tourism, by encouraging acknowledgment and consideration of tourism stakeholders not necessarily acting in a rational manner aiming to benefit themselves and/or others. From the supply perspective, raising awareness, training and upskilling employees of tourism enterprises is one way to reduce stupid behaviour. Moreover, monitoring and accountability from within an organisation as well as externally is needed to protect organisations from stupid acts of individuals.

This conceptual research provides a framework and initiates a discussion that can stimulate various other streams of research. Nature versus nurture is one area of potential interest. Are people inherently stupid, as suggested by Cipolla or is stupidity a function of an individual's environment? Two of the underlying explanations provided for stupidity in tourism could be explored. Future research could examine to what extent individuals' personalities or prior travel experience correlate with stupidity in the tourism context. Other research could track to what extent an individual

makes stupid decisions in their home environment vis-à-vis when they are tourists. How does an unfamiliar environment when travelling in a different location and culture affect prudent decision-making? How to integrate irrationality and impulse into models of sustainability, responsible tourism, and smart tourism? These broad questions provide a basis for further exploration.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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